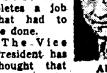
Matter of Fact

By Joseph Alsop

'Repudiation'

VICE PRESIDENT Nixon's public abandonment of the policies of Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson,

which were also President Eisenhower's poljust icies. about completes a job that had to be done.



Alsop

President has thought that Benson ought

to be junked since 1956. After the disastrous 1958 congressional election, made an active effort to junk him. The former Chairman of the Republican National Committee, Meade Alcorn of Connecticut, was the man chosen for the job.

Since it was clear that the President would not listen to the straight policy argumenta against Benson, Alcorn, on Nixon's advice, made the political arguments. These had been only too amply underlined by the election returns. Yet the President's angry answering blast all but blew Alcorn through the door, into the next room; and after that, the subject of Benson was · not r**aised again.**

It is a proof of the Byzantinism of the Eisenhower White House that the subject was never again raised. The hapless Benson has managed to combine a more than fourfold increase of the huge Agriculture Department appropriations with an actual decline of farm income. This year, the \$6 billion-odd that will be spent through Benson amounts to something like half of the reduced revenues of the American farm community.

This incredible record is defended by Benson on the ground that Congress would never enact "the Benson pro-

gram." But in fact neither Benson himself, nor his chief, the President, ever, at any time, launched an all-out, knock-down, dragout fight for decisive legislative changes in the farm program.

Prayer has been the Benson specialty, and latterly he has become a sort of ancient mariner of Washington, almost literally "stopping one in ten" to assure these reluctant listeners that his farm policy was working better and better. Once he even cornered Sen. John F. Kennedy's personal chief of staff, Theodore Sorenson, in the Senate cafeteria.

SINCE sentimentality has no place in Government, the fact that his failures have made the Secretary of Agriculture a somewhat pathetic figure has no bearing on the case. There was a touch of ruthlessness in the way the Vice President, free to junk Benson at last, duly and publicly did what he had wanted to do for so long. But in the circumstances, ruth-lessness was justified and even called for.

As already noted, moreover, this junking of Benson was not an isolated episode. It was, instead, the culminating. episode in an important procs. Since Friday, July 22, the Vice President has been briskly disentangling himself from the President.

The pace of this process was forced, and it was therefore given an undesired dramatic character, by Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller's threat to make a floor fight about the platform at the Republican Convention. Civil rights and defense, the two main issues on which Rockefeller and Nixon thereupon reached agreement on July 22, were again issues on which the Vice President has never agreed with the President.

Rockefeller did not have the votes to make a respectable showing in a floor fight. The Vice President would have much preferred the less drastic method of distinguishing his own positions from the President's positions after the Convention was out of the way. But Rockefeller, by threatening a floor fight, forced Nixon to say what he had always meant to say rather earlier than he had meant to say it.

THE DEMOCRATS will of course cry out that this is "repudiation" of Mr. Eisenhower, and in a sense they will be right. Because of the constitutional changes already examined in this space, a modern Vice President cannot imitate Vice President John N. Garner, for instance, who took rather well-marked independent positions while maintaining friendly working relations with President Roosevelt. A modern Vice President is like a cabinet officer, who must either go along or get out—the thing to be got out of, in the Vice

President's case, being the National Security Council.

Accordingly, Nixon has swallowed his chiections and gone along. But objections them have been the hard the ha there have bonn. He has always believed in a stronger defense program, more force-ful civil rights program, a changed force program, a somewhat less conservative domestic esenomic policy. About Mr. Eisenhower, he was once heard to remark wonderings;:

"In domestie matters, you know, by's really more eon servative than Bob Taft."

If the Vine President's own views how energe, and the opposition aries "repudiation," is does not matter very much As, his party's nominee, History not only has the right to a sak his own mind, as Mr. Misenhower recognised in his telegram of congrasilation at Chicago, he also has the duty to do so

